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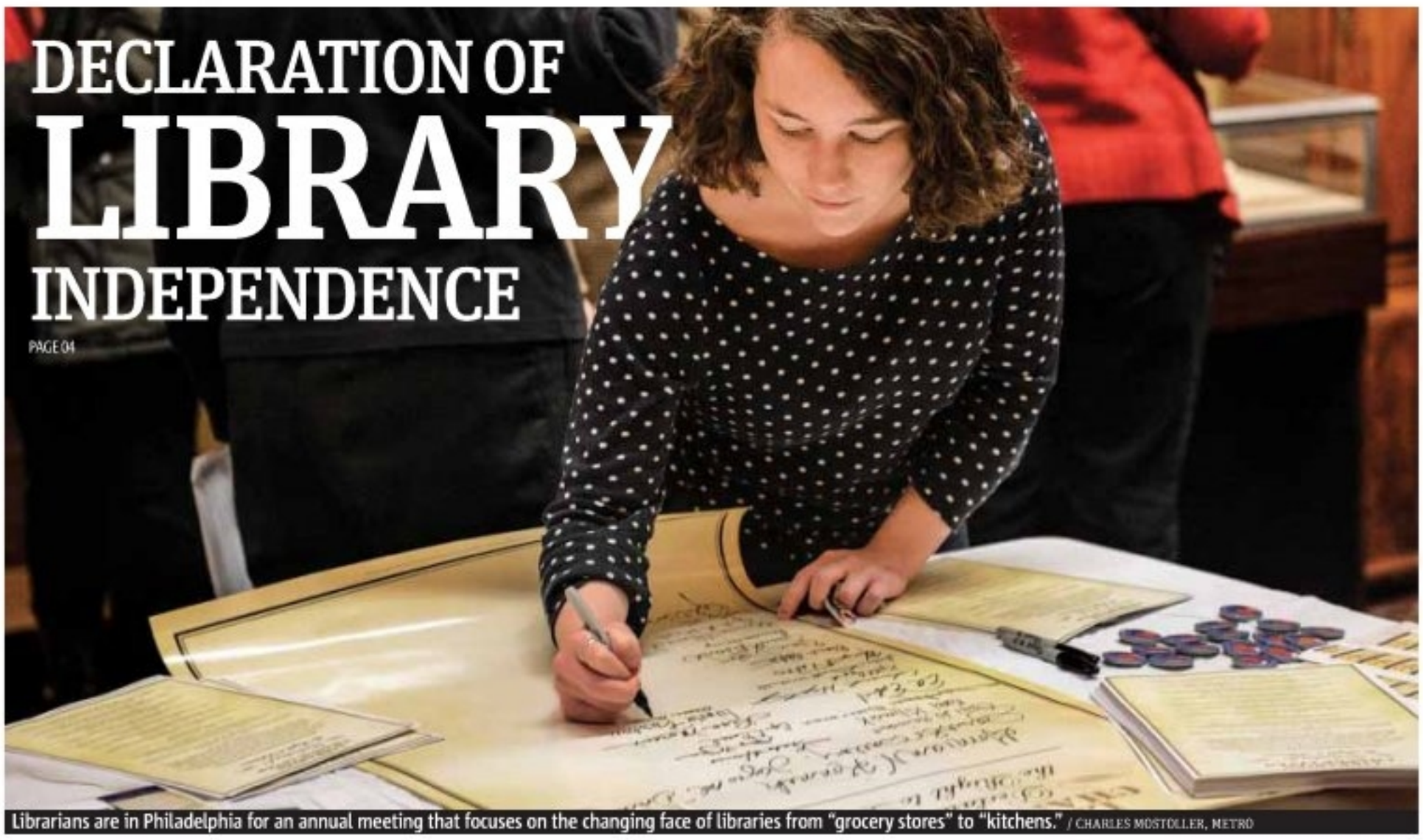
Tuesday, January 28, 2014 www.metro.us | t: MetroPhilly | f: MetroPhilly

STATE REP. BUSTED

All in the family. Jose P. Miranda and his sister Michelle Wilson were each hit with three felony charges of political corruption. **Allegations.** D.A. Seth Williams said Miranda paid WIlson through a "ghost employee" and siphoned money into her account. PAGE 02



DECLARATION OF LIBRARY INDEPENDENCE

PAGE 04

Librarians are in Philadelphia for an annual meeting that focuses on the changing face of libraries from "grocery stores" to "kitchens." / CHARLES MOSTOLLER, METRO

Working it: Meet some double-duty employees

PAGE 10

Kissing Zac Efron: We get to know Imogen Poots

PAGE 15

Sci-fi: Adam Sternbergh's dystopian Manhattan

PAGE 16

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NEWS

Local tweet

"eating pizza with conceptual poets and philadelphia's best bartender"

That sounds fun, Jess Bergman (@jlbergalicious). Next time, can we come?

Top 3

What's trending at Metro.us

1 'PHOTOS: The Grammys' worst (and most confusingly) dressed'

2 'PHOTOS: Funny Amazon reviews of Veet for Men Hair Removal Gel Cream'

3 'This Japanese bra only opens for true love'

DA: State rep. paid his sister under the table

Busted? State Rep. J.P. Miranda faces felony charges for paying his sister through another employee and lying about it.

State Rep. Jose P. Miranda (D-197th dist.), 34, a first-term politician, and his sister, Michelle Wilson, 28, are expected to turn themselves in today at 10 a.m. at the office of District Attorney Seth Williams.

Williams announced three felony charges against each at a press conference on Monday, due to Miranda allegedly hiring Wilson to work in his office.

The Pennsylvania House Democratic Caucus prohibits hiring relatives to work one's office. So Miranda paid his sister through a "straw employee." Once Miranda and Wilson were investigated by a Philadelphia grand jury, they lied to conceal their arrangement.

"Philadelphians … are affronted by this kind of theft," Williams said. "Philadelphians don't want it this way — they don't want their tax dollars wasted."

Miranda wanted to hire Wilson as his chief of staff, but Pennsylvania House Democratic Caucus rules prohibit hiring relatives at political offices.

The investigation concluded that Miranda decided to "circumvent the rules" by paying Timothy Duckett, a former driver for his office, as a full-time employee, and having Duckett give up part of his paycheck to Wilson.

Miranda / PAHOUSE.COM

Quoted

"For a long time, it appeared that these types of cases would not be investigated nor prosecuted, but that is no longer the case." Williams

Duckett was highlighted in a May 2013 broadcast by FOX 29, which described him as a "ghost employee" and showed that he was working at his auto repair shop while listed as a full-time employee in Miranda's legislative office.

That news story led directly to this investigation, Williams said.

Duckett has been granted immunity in this case in return for his cooperation with the investigation.

"Yes, he was committing a crime. … [But] in some ways, he was a victim himself," Williams said of Duckett.

Miranda and Wilson are each charged with conflict of interest, perjury and criminal conspiracy. If given maximum sentences on each count, they could each face 17 years in prison.

Miranda will not be required to leave office unless he is convicted.

By the numbers

$36K
Duckett's pay as a driver

$2.6K
Duckett gave to Wilson, from Feb. 21 to April 2, 2013

$1,166
Duckett's take-home pay

SAM NEWHOUSE
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Spike TV is calling all tattoo artists

Tattoo artists Fallon Vendetta and Shane Munce wait for their chance to audition at an open call for Spike TV's upcoming show, "Ink Master 5," in Center City on Monday. Emily Asylum, inset, shows off her ink. / CHARLES MOSTOLLER, METRO

Damages. Victims of fire escape collapse file landlord lawsuit

A lawsuit has been filed against landlord Alex Khorram of The Khorram Group by the families of two roommates injured in the collapse of a fire escape outside his Rittenhouse apartment building, which killed one.

Albert Suh, 22, died from his injuries, and Laura O'Brien, suffered severe back and leg injuries.

Suh and O'Brien were roommates in the building on 22nd Street and St. James Place, and were hosting a birthday party when they and one other roommate, not named in the lawsuit, stepped onto the fire escape to smoke.

The suit states that the corroded iron rails of the fire escape broke, and the platform fell away from the wall. Suh was a financial analyst for JP Morgan Chase and had recently graduated from Penn State University. O'Brien is a kindergarten teacher at Grover Cleveland School in North Philadelphia.

The suit, filed in Common Pleas Court, seeks unspecified damages.

SAM NEWHOUSE

Arrested

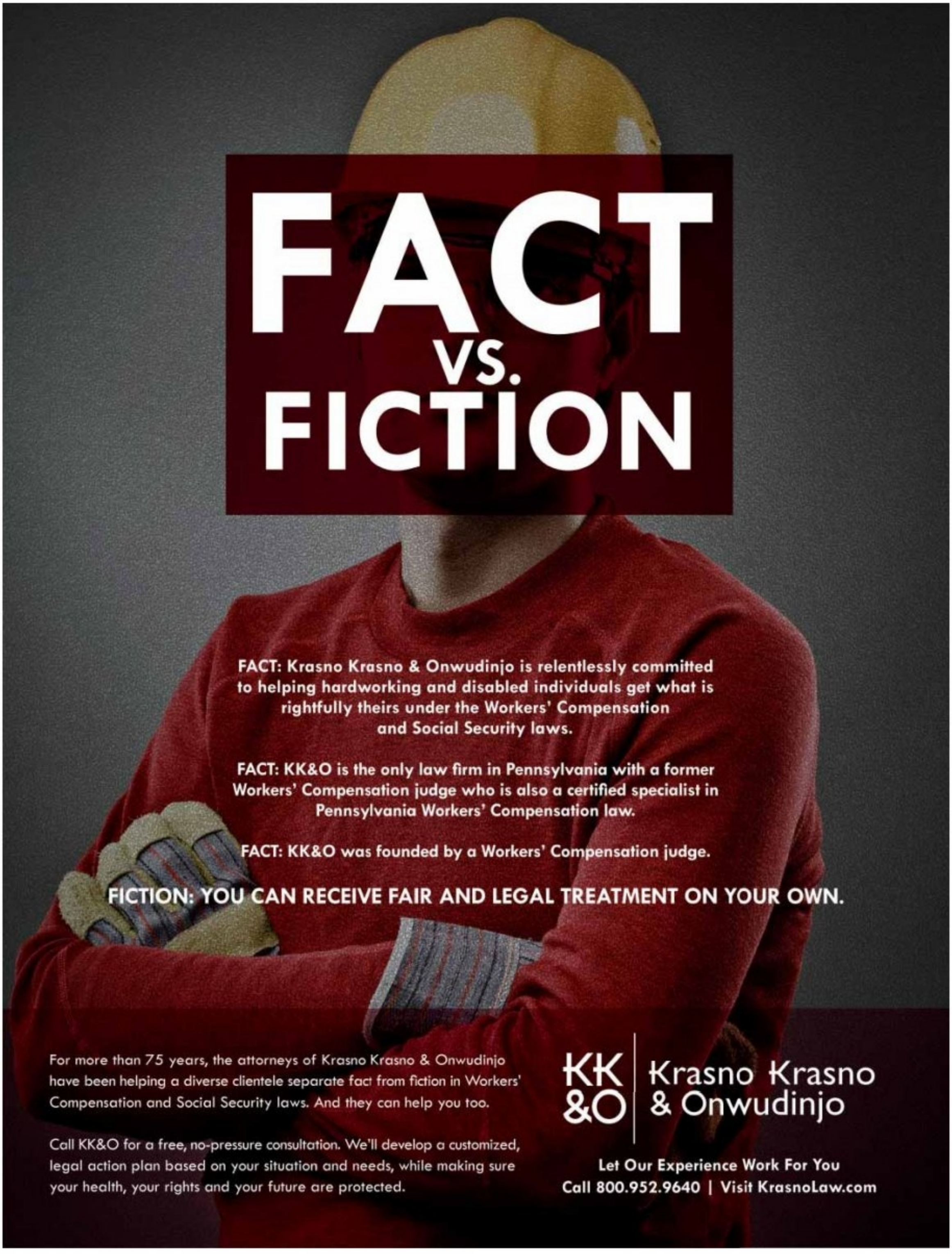
Man charged in boxer's murder

An arrest has been made in the shooting death of 19-year-old Jahmeer Alphonso Jett, an aspiring boxer and a Philadelphia Police officer's son.

Kevin Davis, 25, was arrested and charged with murder Monday for allegedly shooting Jett on Jan. 17 outside his home at 62nd Street and Gray's Avenue.

Jett died from multiple shots to the back.

METRO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Bill Johnson, from North Philadelphia, uses the computer at the Free Library on Logan Square. "The librarians are very helpful," he says. "Without them, this place is just a building." / CHARLES MOSTOLLER, METRO

Digital love: Libraries struggle to survive in changing times

Reinvent. They are now digital meccas, with access to everything you need, say librarians.

Gail Dickinson can't take credit for the analogy.

"But libraries used to be described as a grocery store," said Dickinson, who's in town for the American Library Association's Midwinter Meeting. "Where you went and bought things to make something somewhere else."

But there's been a shift, she said. Patrons are now mixing books with technology and they're doing it inside the library instead of at home. "Now, a library has become a kitchen."

Dickinson, president of the American Association of School Librarians, is joining thousands of library professionals at the ALA meeting in Philadelphia Tuesday.

The main topics address the deterioration of school libraries, the closing of public libraries, budget cuts and how to bridge the digital and generational divides. But the future is already here. Libraries are becoming classrooms.

Barbara Stripling, president of the American Library Association, said she sees students who are excited about technology. Libraries provide opportunities to use iPads and advanced programs.

And what about the Millennials?

Siobhan A. Reardon, president of the Free Library of Philadelphia, said the challenge is creating the environment. "Millennials are gadget oriented. They're incredibly engaged."

Reardon said Philadelphia's challenge is literacy — digital literacy. "It's all about civic engagement, all about the experience of the library."

TOMMY ROWAN
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Self-evident

Supporting library survival

Philadelphia is a battleground in the revolution against child literacy.

"Philadelphia is an example of a community that is really struggling in the school library realm," said Stripling.

On Monday, students, parents and advocates signed the ALA Declaration for the Right to Libraries showing support for the survival of libraries.

According to the ALA, more than 135,000 of Philadelphia's students no longer have access a certified librarian.

Only 16 certified school librarians remain.

"They're not learning the information skills," Stripling said.

Sentenced

Serial rapist gets up to 60 years

Serial rapist William Walker, 44, was sentenced Monday to 24 to 60 years in prison for four separate violent rapes of mentally disabled women, said the district attorney's office.

In 2012, Walker raped four women in just under two weeks. Police found him with his fourth and last rape victim in a wooded area after a witness saw Walker dragging her and called 911.

He beat all four women he raped, according to the DA, and in one instance, choked a victim. METRO

Traffic Court official admits role in fraud

Rampant. A fourth official pleaded guilty to 18 counts of fraud, including ticket-fixing, at the now-defunct Traffic Court.

William Hird, 68, the former director of records at the Traffic Court, pleaded guilty Monday in Philadelphia federal court to 18 counts including conspiracy, wire fraud, mail fraud and lying to the FBI about ticket-fixing.

Previously, former Traffic Court Judge Fortunato Perri Sr. pleaded guilty in March 2013.

According to the office of U.S. Attorney Zane Memeger, Perri would receive traffic citation numbers, the names of those with violations, or the citation itself, where "fixing" the ticket was requested.

Perri would convey these requests to Hird, who would pass along the requests to the assigned judge or judge's staff.

An FBI investigation last year found that corruption was rampant in Philadelphia Traffic Court, and nine judges were indicted for their involvement in fraud.

Ticket-fixing entailed dismissing the traffic tickets, finding the ticket holder not guilty or finding them guilty of a lesser offense, according to prosecutors.

Ticket holders getting fixing services often did not have to appear in court, avoided getting points added to their driving record and paid less in fines — or none at all — for traffic violations. Hird faces a possible sentence of 12 to 18 months in prison. The Philadelphia Traffic Court was dissolved by the Legislature at the end of 2013 as a result of the ticket-fixing investigation.

SAM NEWHOUSE
sam.newhouse@metro.us

Quoted

"Hird was extremely loyal to Perri, given that Perri helped Hird move up the ladder to a high-level administrator at Traffic Court. Given Hird's position at Traffic Court and access to the judges, Hird was able to facilitate requests for ticket-fixing for Perri." Memeger

Endangerment

Jury selection starts in water torture case

Jury selection began on Monday in the trial of a Delaware pediatrician accused of disciplining his 11-year-old daughter by using waterboarding, a simulated drowning technique associated with interrogating terrorism suspects.

Melvin Morse faces charges of endangering the welfare of a child, reckless endangerment and conspiracy. He is the author of a best-selling book on near-death experiences.

Morse was arrested in 2012 after his daughter, then 11, told police she was waterboarded, which involves pouring water on a person's face.

Opening statements were expected to begin on Tuesday in Sussex County Superior Court.

REUTERS

The great un-freeze

Temperatures rose above freezing on Monday, creating puddles for pedestrians to avoid, like this one at 10th and Arch streets in Chinatown. / CHARLES MOSTOLLER, METRO

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Obama expands State of Union on social media as TV fades

New media. The campaign includes Google Hangouts and Facebook chats by cabinet members.

President Barack Obama is deploying just about every trendy social media tool to promote a century-old ritual — the annual State of the Union address to Congress.

From a kickoff Web video by his chief of staff to a presidential "virtual road trip," the White House is mounting its largest digital drive of the year to heighten the impact of tonight's event amid a declining television audience.

Though the 33.5 million viewers Obama drew last year is half the number Bill Clinton had 20 years earlier, the address remains a major TV event, topping both the Emmy Awards and World Series in viewership. Yet with his job-approval rating down 10 points from last year, Obama will also need the new media to engage his party's base, whose enthusiasm is vital if Democrats are to keep control of the Senate in the 2014 election.

"There are a lot of reasons to dismiss the State of the Union," said Jon Favreau, Obama's former chief speechwriter. "But aside from championship sporting events and a few awards shows, it is the one annual event that much of the country watches together."

Rooted in a quill-and-parchment constitutional clause, the address functions as a high-tech organizing tool for the White House to engage past and present supporters.

"The Internet loves moments," said Nicco Mele, a lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and former webmaster for Democrat Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign. "What is powerful about the State of the Union for the White House is it is a moment that they create and control." BLOOMBERG

Quoted

"What is powerful about the State of the Union for the White House is it is a moment that they create and control." Mele

GETTY IMAGES

Brutally cold weather shuts schools, delays air travel

Bitter cold and high winds surging down from the Arctic pushed wind chills to dangerous levels across the upper Midwest. Officials closed schools in Chicago, Cincinnati and the Cleveland area on Monday due to the biting cold. About 800 flights were canceled within, into and out of the United States on Monday, according to FlightAware.com. REUTERS

Florida

Congressman Radel resigns after cocaine charge

Republican Representative Trey Radel, who was charged in November with buying cocaine, resigned from Congress on Monday.

Radel, 37, returned to Congress in January, six weeks after he pleaded guilty to cocaine possession and checked into a rehabilitation clinic.

"Unfortunately, some of my struggles had serious consequences. While I have dealt with those issues on a personal level, it is my belief that professionally I cannot fully and effectively serve as a United States Representative to the place I love and call home, Southwest Florida," he wrote in a letter to House Speaker John Boehner on Monday. REUTERS

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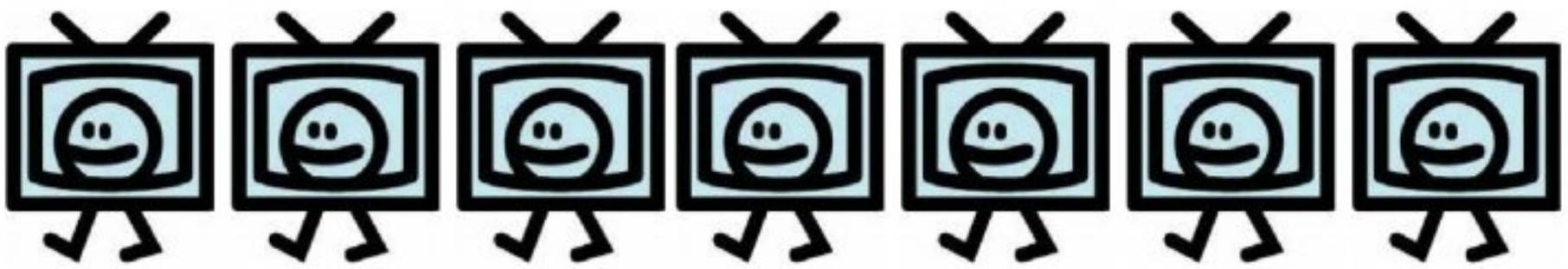

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Illnesses. Cruise ship will return early for sick passengers

Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. said one of its ships will return home from the Caribbean two days early after hundreds of passengers and crew became sick.

Almost 19 percent of passengers on board the Explorer of the Seas — 577 out of 3,050 — had gastrointestinal illnesses such as diarrhea, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on its website.

The outbreak "appears to be" the norovirus, Adam Goldstein, chief executive officer of the Royal Caribbean International line, said Monday on a conference call, referring to the contagious stomach bug. "This has been a difficult situation."

The ship left Cape Liberty, N.J., on Jan. 21 for a 10-day cruise in the Caribbean and now will return Jan. 29. Royal Caribbean said the ship, once home, will undergo a complete sanitization, its third since the outbreak began. BLOOMBERG

Sick crew

49

Forty-nine of the 1,165 crew members also were sick, said the CDC, who sent officials on the ship yesterday in the Virgin Islands to assess the situation.

Gun violence

Maryland mall reopens after fatal shooting

A Maryland mall where a 19-year-old gunman shot and killed two young store employees before apparently taking his own life was scheduled to reopen on Monday with increased law enforcement presence, police said.

The popular retail complex in Columbia, Md., about 20 miles west of Baltimore, has been closed since Darion Marcus Aguilar fired six to eight shots from a 12-gauge shotgun on Saturday as the mall bustled with weekend shoppers.

Police are still investigating what drove Aguilar, of College Park, Md., to shoot and whether he knew the two employees of a clothing and skateboard shop who died. No evidence has revealed a relationship between Aguilar and the victims. REUTERS

Southwest to begin flights to Aruba, Bahamas and Jamaica

Yeh, mon. The U.S. carrier will offer nonstop flights to some tropical destination islands.

The company said yields, a measure of the average fare, on international routes were about 40 percent higher than those on domestic flights. / GETTY IMAGES

Southwest Airlines Co currently offers flights to Mexico and the Caribbean through AirTran, which it acquired in 2011. The U.S. carrier said a new reservations system that can handle international bookings was up and running.

Starting July 1, Southwest will have nonstop flights between Atlanta and Aruba and Montego Bay, Jamaica; between Baltimore/Washington and Aruba, Nassau and Montego Bay; and between Orlando and Aruba and Montego Bay.

By year's end, all current AirTran international flights will be converted to Southwest, Chief Executive Gary Kelly told a media conference that was broadcast over the Internet.

International flying is a growth opportunity for Southwest, which has curbed flights to unprofitable markets and is retiring older aircraft to reduce maintenance costs.

Kelly added that Southwest would not likely add new international cities this year beyond the areas served by AirTran. He said Southwest was not currently planning to add bigger aircraft. It currently operates Boeing 737s.

Robert Jordan, chief commercial officer, said Southwest was looking at a "pretty robust number of new cities" it could fly to over the next few years. Southwest is spending more than $100 million at Houston's William Hobby Airport to install gates and a customs facility as it looks to add flights to Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America in 2015. REUTERS

Quoted

"We're going to look at routes that our customers desire, look at routes that are over-fared and there are plenty of over-fared routes both north and south." Jordan

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Second shift: Creative ways city dwellers make ends meet

See more at www.metro.us

Work life. In a new series, readers share their stories about working more than one job. Want to be featured? Email emily.laurence@metro.us

We all know living in a big city is expensive. So how do people do it? Our new column, Second Shift, features people working more than one job to make it work.

Jackie Caruso

Age: 27
Residency: Hoboken, N.J.
Number of jobs: 4

You have four jobs?! What are they and how do you do it?
I work as a freelance makeup artist, doing makeup for commercials, TV shows, weddings and magazines. My second job is as a freelance makeup artist for a makeup school called Makeup Designory. I work in their store, Mud Shop. My third job is as a bottle service girl at a private club. And fourth, I work for a catering company at a big New York sports venue.

How do you make your schedule?
It changes every week. Sometimes I'll work three jobs in one day: I'll work at the makeup store from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., cater from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., and [work at] the club from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. I try and put my makeup first, because that's my passion. Then I'll take jobs with the catering company because it's steady and reliable money. But my schedule is never the same.

Are you working multiple jobs to make ends meet or is it because you want to live a certain lifestyle and have enough money to support it?
I think a bit of both. I'm not going to lie: Paying rent is hard. But I did just go on a big three-week vacation with my sister. And I still go out to dinner and drinks. My dream is to open my own studio, where clients can get their makeup, hair, spray tanning and eyelash extensions done. It would be a one-stop shop for women going out or to an event. Right now I'm just trying to get through the end of the year, but next year I want to start saving — even if it's just $10 or $20 of each paycheck.

Free time

Do you still have time to hang out with your friends?
Yes and no. Sometimes I won't see my best friend for two weeks, but I definitely make an effort. Even if it's just me stopping by the bar on the way home for a few minutes, I definitely try.

Jackie Caruso works her makeup magic on a client. / JACKIE CARUSO

EMILY LAURENCE
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Final thoughts

Overall, are you happy with your lifestyle?
Trying to pay my bills every month, I have to love what I do. If you don't love what you do, you're going to be miserable. I know reaching my ultimate goal isn't going to happen next year, and it might not happen in five years. But it will happen one day.

After service, time for class

Military. Programs for veterans invite brave men and women to campus.

VICKI SALEMI
letters@metro.us

Transitioning into civilian life can be easier while hitting the books.
V STOCK

As veterans assimilate into civilian life after fulfilling their active duty commitment, one major way to begin their next chapter lies in their education.

According to the Center for American Progress, about 400,000 veterans were enrolled in a higher education institution during the spring semester of 2012. Because numbers are expected to grow as soldiers return from deployment and assimilate back into civilian life, schools are preparing to meet their needs. That's not surprising when you look at the post-9/11 GI Bill, which includes full funding of a public four-year undergraduate education to veterans who have served three years of active duty since Sept. 11, 2001.

Dr. Jose E. Coll, director of Veteran Student Services of Saint Leo University, has seen an increase in the student veteran population by 30 percent — a number that comprises more than one-third of the total student population. (The school's 49 locations in seven states are often located on or near military bases.) It's not uncommon for service members to enroll in classes while deployed.

He explains the importance of hitting the books sooner rather than later. "Not only does this help with transitioning, but it can also expedite the process of completing your degree."

Of course, studying is one thing; getting acclimated to student life is another. At Fordham University, the boots-to-books program and a special orientation focus on the needs of this unique student population.

Michael Gillan, the associate vice president of Fordham's Westchester campus and co-chair of University Veterans Affairs, says getting to know every veteran on campus is about "recognizing who they are and communicating with them right away." Getting to know them also helps them not disappear into anonymity on campus.

Like many schools, Fordham invites its nearly 350 veterans to a special orientation where they are introduced to representatives from the university's student services, Veterans Affairs, the Iraq Veterans of America and others.

Getting oriented and feeling welcome is a priority, as is feeling comfortable in the classroom. Shawn A. Mann, the director of Military & Veteran Education Programs at Baker College Online, says, "There is nothing more disheartening to a combat veteran than sitting in a Freshman 101 orientation class next to an 18-year-old fresh out of high school."

To counter this, schools like Baker evaluate veterans' transcripts and allow service members to accrue college credit for military training and the experience they have already obtained.

What to look for in a vet-friendly program

Shawn A. Mann of Baker College Online offers these tips:

- If the goal is to obtain a job post-graduation, choose the college and the degree program with solid post-graduation employment rates.
- Due diligence for a potential military student or veteran involves finding the educational institution that values student success over tuition dollars.

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2 CULTURE

Twitter feed

Today, Marlon Wayans is enjoying Twitter, Emma Watson needed a break anyway and Kelly Osbourne is not a fan of awards shows.

@MarlonWayans: Love that u guys can actually hear the wild, crazy, off-base, sometimes crass and rude thoughts in my head thru social media

@EmWatson: Computer just crashed. Pain au chocolat anyone?

@KellyOsbourne: been standing in 7 inch heels since 11am almost a full 12 hours I don't think I will be able to walk tomorrow its soooo good to sit down!

JAMES DEVANEY, GC IMAGES

The best, new friendship ever?

Can someone please make a reality TV show out of the friendship of Meryl Streep and 50 Cent? The two were all smiles at the Los Angeles Lakers vs. New York Knicks game at Madison Square Garden on Sunday night in New York City.

THE WORD

Dorothy Robinson takes on the world of gossip.

DOROTHY ROBINSON
@dorothyatmetro
dorothy.robinson@metro.us

Whatever you do, don't share any Prince bootlegs.

GETTY IMAGES

Prince sues his fans

Prince, say it ain't so? The Purple One is apparently going after some of his fans for posting recordings of some live performances online.

According to Radar Online, the singer is suing two California individuals for infringing on his copyright by sharing bootlegs, and he's seeking $1 million in damages from each of them.

"The Defendants rely on either Google's Blogger platform or Facebook, or both, to accomplish their unlawful activity," the suit claims, adding that the fans "typically publish posts that list all the songs performed at a certain Prince live show and then provide a link to a file-sharing service where unauthorized copies of the performance can be downloaded." Prince's lawyers say they have found more than 360 such links.

The Grammys' In Memoriam misspelled Cory Monteith's name

The Grammy Awards would like everyone to know how very, very sorry they are about the death of what's-his-name.

"Glee" star Cory Monteith, who died last summer, was included in the Grammys' "In Memoriam" montage of musicians lost in the past year. However, the slideshow spelled his name "Cory Montieth."

Listen, Grammys, I know you're a drunken, long-winded stripper of an awards show, but if you're only going to spell check one thing — one thing — it should probably be the names of dead people. Maybe next year, have one fewer fake blood cannon and put that part of the budget toward a proofreader.

"Glee" isn't the only one with a grievance against last night's Grammys: Trent Reznor is none to happy with them, either.

Reznor's band Nine Inch Nails gave the awards show's closing performance, along with Queens of the Stone Age, Dave Grohl and Fleetwood Mac's Lindsey Buckingham.

Cory Monteith? Cory Montieth? Eh, whatever. / TWITTER

Unfortunately, by the end of a four-hour ceremony, not even all that star power could induce people to wait around and listen — the Grammys began to roll the credits during the performance.

Reznor didn't take it lying down. "A heartfelt F— YOU guys," he tweeted.

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Grammys. We have one word for you: HAT. The worst (and most confusingly) dressed of the night

1 OK, OK. **Taylor Swift** actually looked quite stunning in this elegant gold number. But ain't nothing fashionable about those middle-aged, wine-drunk white lady dance moves. And #taylorswiftraphands is now trending. (But not, of course, on-trend.)

2 There is a lot of shiny white material here, and all of it is alarming. Did **CeeLo Green** raid his grandma's closet and jack her "fancy" pajamas pre-show?

3 **Madonna** might be the Queen of Pop, but there's nothing royal about her wearing grills to fancy events. There's a line just waiting to be written about her in a Lorde song.

4 **Kacey Musgraves** should have followed her arrow directly to a professional stylist. Her trashy-server-at-strip-mall-TexMex-joint look wasn't doing her many favors.

5 There is no joke about **Pharrel Williams'** hat we could make that the Internet has not made already. We'll just leave this photo right here.

6 Hahaha, you guys. **Steven Tyler** was just listed as the 26th most fashionable Bostonian in some list from some Internet retailer, US Trendy. Dude looks like a lady: We had a hard time telling him apart from Madge in their white suit-things.

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YVONNE STRAHOVSKI

The "Chuck," "Dexter" and future "24" actress tries her hand at blockbuster horror.

SAVING 'FRANKENSTEIN'

Between television turns on "Chuck," "Dexter" and this summer's "24: Live Another Day," Australian actress Yvonne Strahovski squeezed in some time opposite Aaron Eckhart as a scientist with good intentions but evil bosses in "I, Frankenstein." It's all part of her plan to keep her work as diverse as possible — and learning the importance of saying no.

This role is a bit of a departure for you, genre-wise. What were your thoughts on the project and character when you first signed on?
It definitely feels like one of the bigger things that I've been a part of. I really liked the script — it had that real story of the monster finding its humanity within this action movie. [My character] has got a big heart but she's also a really strong woman. She isn't a damsel in distress. She can stand up for herself, and she certainly does in the movie, even though she's not a trained fighter.

Do you find yourself seeking out roles like that?
I try and change it up. I feel like so far I've been lucky enough to do so, whether it's "I, Frankenstein" or playing a serial killer [on "Dexter"] or a 1930s New York gal on Broadway.

We're not sure how much you're allowed to say about the new "24" series.
I'm not allowed to say too much, but I'm definitely in the throes of moving to London for the next half a year to shoot "24." I'll be playing a gal named Kate Morgan, who is hunting Jack Bauer when we meet her.

That's tantalizing.
Yeah, to say the least. [Laughs] It's been what, four years, right? Since season eight finished? So many people are really excited about it. I didn't realize how many people were really big on following the show.

How do you think that compares to the fan community around "Chuck"?
They're pretty similar. People who are enthusiastic about shows tend to be equally enthusiastic, I think. And "Chuck" was special for me. It was my first thing, you know? So we had a special bond with the fans, especially because we felt like they helped us survive the five years that we were on the air. They kept fighting for us to stay on the air. It's been really great to have that support.

GETTY IMAGES

NED EHRBAR
ned.ehrbar@metro.lu

Mixing it up

How do you find striking a balance between movies and TV?

It's hard. Like with any profession, you start off at the very beginning saying "yes" to a lot of different things because you just want to get on your feet and get your foot in the door. And as you create your body of work, I think saying "no" is a really important thing to learn, as important as saying "yes."

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The breakthrough: Imogen Poots

On the rise. The actress is riding high, with several major releases slated for this year.

She didn't catch the acting bug as a kid: "I did a group at … a very low key theater group when I was about 15, but that was very much just because I liked it. Then I started to go out on auditions around that time, when maybe I was about 16, 17. I just found there was something really satiating and electric and brilliant and inspiring all at once about acting. I just felt at ease existing in this sort of world and it was something I just wanted to give a shot at."

Why she did "That Awkward Moment": "I think I understood what was happening. No relationships, I suppose, are straightforward, but especially modern day with technology and this whole idea that [love] can wait, and let's have fun and we'll explore relationships later — that stuff can be really silly and a real shame because you [could] miss out on something that could be pretty great. Also I just felt like I really was excited about being part of something that was very relevant, very now, that hopefully won't feel dated in a decade."

On the film's unsung character: "I do think [New York] plays a huge role in the movie — any metropolis, actually, but specifically New York to the way these characters are constructed and the way they think. You think differently in a city as [compared] to how you would kind of in middle America or in a different culture."

Her first on-screen kiss is one for the books: "My first on-screen kiss was Michael Douglas when I was 19 [in 'Solitary Man']. … I think on-screen kisses can always be so peculiar, and sometimes they can be actually worse when you know the person really, really well. You've become buddies. It's strange."

… But kissing Zac Efron wasn't so bad: "With Zac it was just really fun. You both know it's ridiculous and you both know there's a million people watching you and thinking, 'They're about to kiss!' But no, kissing Zac is no problem — it's all fun."

Imogen Poots' latest is "That Awkward Moment," in theaters Friday.
GETTY IMAGES

Zac Efron, Aaron Paul, Michael Douglas — who's the best kisser?

"I probably would go with Zac for the sake of the movie — make people go see that great kiss."

Stats

Imogen Poots

Age: 24
Originally from: London

Where you've seen her: Besides on Metro's "2014 Ones to Watch" list? Horror films like "Fright Night" and "28 Weeks Later," and in recent well-reviewed music-themed works like "A Late Quartet" and "Greetings from Tim Buckley."

Where you'll see her now: As Zac Efron's spunky love interest in "That Awkward Moment," where she conceals any trace of her British accent as Ellie, a writer.

Where you'll see her next: Alongside Aaron Paul in March's "Need for Speed," and later, in Peter Bogdanovich's "Squirrels to Nuts," with Jennifer Aniston and Owen Wilson.

MEREDITH ENGEL
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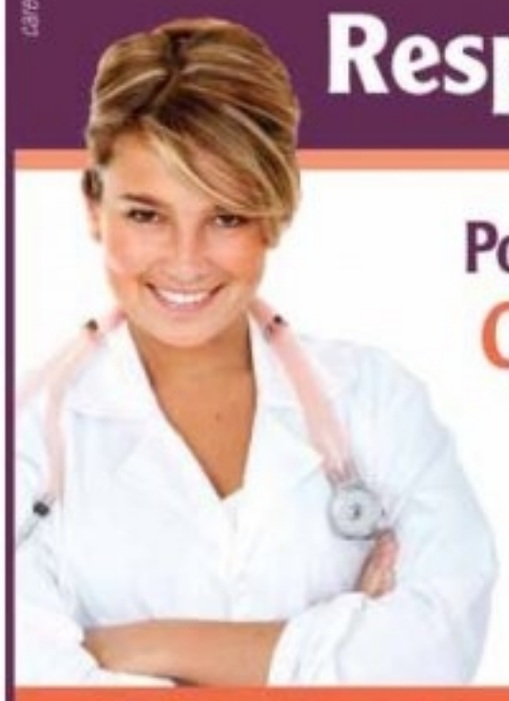

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(But, remember, he wasn't always an old ugly man - once, he was just ugly)

Explore post-apocalyptic New York in 'Shovel Ready'

Books. Author Adam Sternbergh envisions two threats looming over the future of New York City.

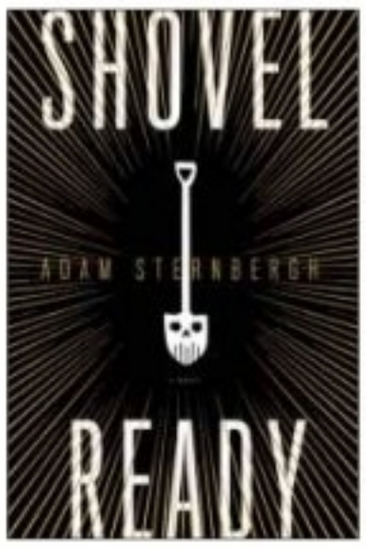
What would it take for New York to return to the gritty, dangerous city it was pre-Michael Bloomberg? In a time when the city is only getting cleaner and more expensive, author Adam Sternbergh writes about a lawless, treacherous New York in his novel, "Shovel Ready." The book is set in the near future after a bomb hits Times Square. Those who can leave do, abandoning others with no options who must forge a new life in a deteriorating city. At the heart of the book is a former trash collector, who becomes a hitman.

If you think this sounds like it would make a good movie, you aren't alone. The book has already been optioned by Warner Brothers and Denzel Washington has signed on, potentially to play the lead.

"I tried to convey the idea of what one character calls this 'incremental apocalypse,'" says Sternbergh, the culture editor at the New York Times Magazine. "The apocalypse stuff we see in movies and books is usually very dramatic, with aliens blowing up the Empire State Building or zombies overrunning the city."

Sternbergh says he was more interested in the idea of a change taking place slowly, similarly to what happened in many major U.S. cities during the '60s and '70s. He cites Detroit as a modern-day example. "It's not as dramatic as the terrorist element in the book, but Detroit is completely unrecognizable now [compared to what] it was 50 years ago," he says.

"Shovel Ready" also explores our relationship with technology. Wealthy city residents who choose



not to leave cocoon themselves in a virtual reality, where all their fantasies can become real. "There was something very familiar about the idea of getting lost in real life and the way in which having that technological outlet can sometimes cause us to ignore what's happening around us," Sternbergh explains.

As someone who has been living in and reporting on New York City for the last 10 years, Sternbergh says he certainly doesn't hope the city will descend into what is portrayed in the book — but he hopes it doesn't go too far in the other direction either.

Sternbergh fears that in a decade, New York City will feel museum-like, as he says Paris does, a beautiful city that exists for people to admire but lacking the energy and rebirth that New York thrives on. "You have to imagine in 10 years the city is going to be very different than it is now, and I hope we'll still be here to enjoy it. And that the Second Avenue subway will be open."

EMILY LAURENCE
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Adam Sternbergh is already working on the sequel to "Shovel Ready." / MARVIN ORELLANA

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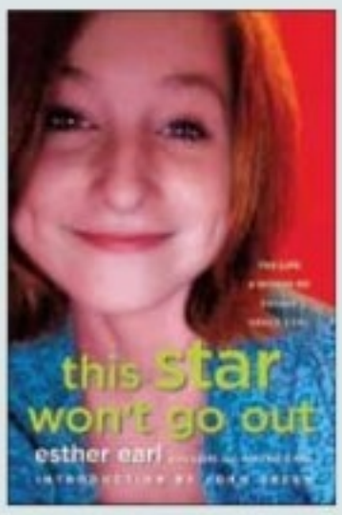
YA books adults should read

You don't have to be 14 to enjoy these three newly released books. **EMILY LAURENCE**

1 'This Star Won't Go Out'

By Esther Earl



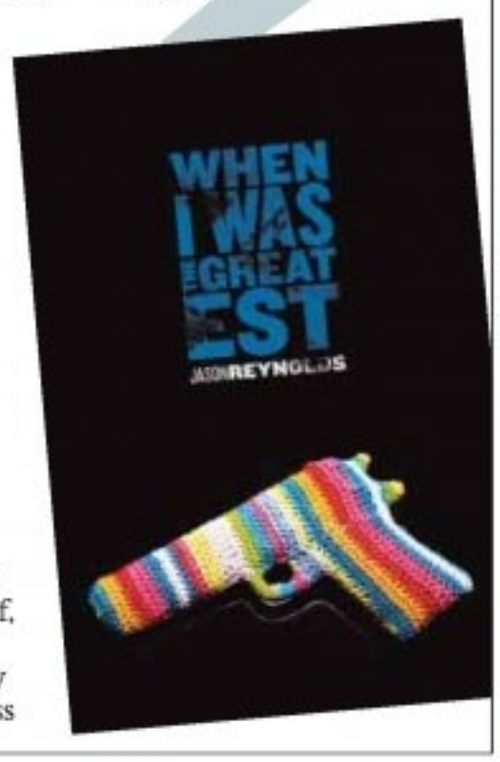
Just so you can't say we didn't warn you, "This Star Won't Go Out" will make you sob (unless you don't have a soul). But it will also make you smile, as it's one of those rare books that will change the way you look at the world. The true story of Esther Earl, a teen with cancer, this book is a compilation of her essays, short fiction, journal entries and family photos. You might not expect a 16-year-old with a terminal illness to be funny, but Earl is cleverly so, while eschewing bitterness.

Author John Green got to know Earl after meeting her at a Harry Potter convention, and they formed a meaningful friendship. So meaningful, in fact, that he dedicated "The Fault in Our Stars" to her and wrote the foreword to this book. Just released, "This Star Won't Go Out" is one book that will stick with you long after you finish it.

2 'When I Was the Greatest'

By Jason Reynolds

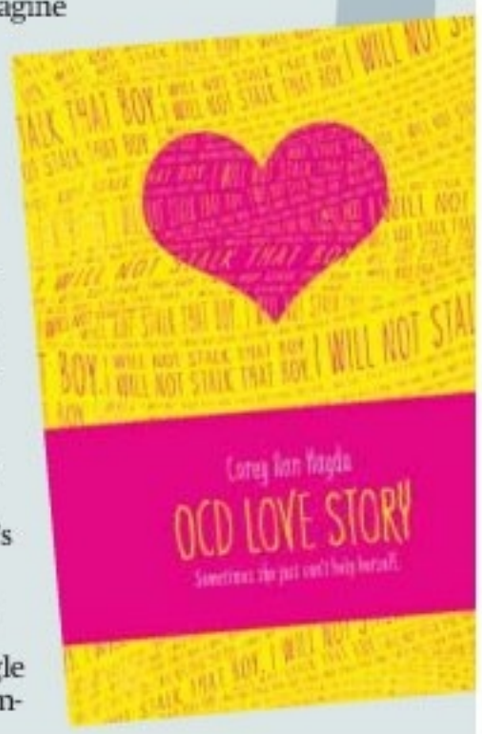
Set in the New York City enclave of Bed-Stuy, this novel follows a teen named Allen who does his best to stay out of trouble, despite the drugs and violence ubiquitous in his neighborhood. He's focused on school, boxing and his family, but the same can't be said for his best friend Noodles, who is always getting into trouble. Allen tries to be there for his friends while trying to stay out of trouble himself, a conflict that is a reality for many urban teens across the country. Allen eventually gets himself in over his head, and you'll keep reading to find out what will happen to him.



3 'OCD Love Story'

By Corey Ann Haydu

Almost everyone can relate to meeting someone who is totally right for you, but lusting after someone so wrong for you instead. Imagine that, plus having obsessive-compulsive disorder, and being a high school senior. Welcome to Bea's world. In this novel, Bea meets a quirky-cool guy in her therapy group who also has OCD. For once, here's a guy who knows exactly what she's going through. Unfortunately, she's obsessed with a married musician, tracking his every move. If you struggle with anxiety or compulsive disorder, you'll be able to relate to Bea's attempt at normalcy. But even if you don't, her struggle to balance everything is universal.



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Antidote to the polar vortex

Breezes Bahamas, located in Nassau, is one of the precious few all-inclusive resorts on all of the country's islands. / BREEZES

Warmth. Too cold in the Northeast? Let Breezes Bahamas warm you up.

The bitter cold reality of life in the Northeast early in the year dares you to flock elsewhere. So it's not surprising that the peak season for the Bahamas lies in the bleak midwinter. The glut of tourists from the U.S., who can fly there from many airports, has made for a curious culture. On one hand, those who live there maintain the Arawak lifestyle that links them with South America. On the other, they've made room for things American. Indeed, the Bahamian Independence Day is only a few days after the American equivalent. Because tourism is so prevalent, they celebrate both, one right after the other.

The Bahamas teem with fancy hot spots, especially in Nassau, the capital city. It is here that James Bond has returned again and again, including in his maiden voyage, "Dr. No." Breezes Bahamas was the first of what are still only three all-inclusive resorts on the islands, and it remains one of the best deals. This isn't a sleek castle that protects one from everything but the weather and beaches — it's a getaway that tries to keep you close to the islands' life. At Breezes, there are the expected expansive pools, beachfront hang spots and an ever-flowing parade of cocktails whose names you'll quickly forget. But there's also Kalik, the Bahamas' most cherished local beer — a light, sweet brew named for the sound produced by two smacked coconuts.

On site there are myriad activities, including lessons on how to kayak, sail and even (yikes) rock climb. One can relax or get a hot stone massage, and realize — as your body tenses up and rebels against you — the extent of how wound-up your life has made you. Each night features its own special show in the main hall: some tailored for visitors, with bands performing covers of Top 40 staples, plus nights where they play strictly Bahamian music while decked in the kinds of gear you'd see at Junkanoo, a holiday street parade. When that happens, you finally feel far enough from home.

MATT PRIGGE
matt.prigge@metro.us

Things to eat, places to see

Conch salad is one of the great Bahamian delicacies. / PROVIDED

Eat: Conch salad

The mix of local and American is also reflected in the food. The two restaurants at Breezes and the all-day buffet offer "continental" food while slipping in Bahamian delicacies and twists on American standards. But you'll have to go off-site to take in the country's most cherished foodstuff: conch salad, a refreshing mix of onions, tomatoes and the tangy white meat pulled from shells. A bowl of the stuff will run you $10. We recommend the ones from Twin Brothers.

See: Straw Market

One of the biggest draws in Nassau is the Straw Market, the legendary, cavernous home to local goods from straw hats to art, some repurposed from aluminum cans. Rum can be purchased here, but see if you can make it off the beaten path to John Watling's Distillery. They make craft rum, including one closer to a nursable cognac.

PLUS

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Breckenridge, Colo.

If the Broncos' recent win to advance to the Super Bowl is making you dream of a snowy Colorado getaway, then you need to check out this gorgeous Breckenridge lodge. Located just an hour and a half west of Denver, this home is the perfect winter retreat. With six bedrooms and four bathrooms, the lodge can comfortably sleep up to 19 guests — just the ticket for families and large groups. And with rates starting at $600/night, a visit won't break the bank. Search rental ID # 111351.

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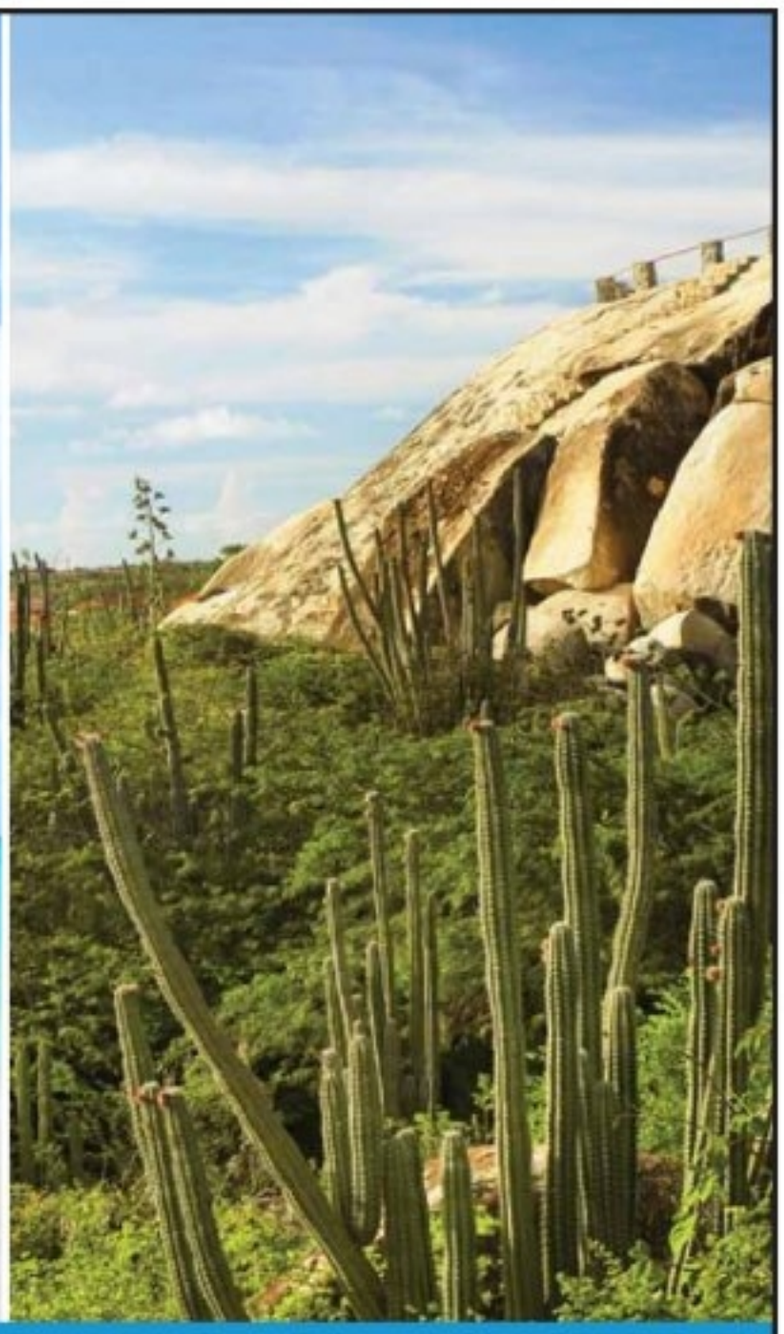

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Men's grooming

Need a V-Day idea for your guy?

We've been fans of heritage beauty brand Santa Maria Novella for quite some time, so we're thrilled to learn that the Florence-based company is branching out with an exclusive 14-piece "Resorting Line" for fashion-savvy men's boutique MrPorter.com.

Founded in 1221 by monks — their herbal remedies were so good that the monastery eventually became one of the first pharmacies — the brand has evolved to meet the needs of modern times.

We love the current updated prestige packaging and the fact that the artisanal methods and age-old recipes remain. Get some of the aloe cream or papaya gel for your boy this Valentine's Day. Trust us, these are some grooming products he won't fight you on. TINA CHADHA

Leather pants done right

Fashion. Get this understated but cool winter look with the following five staples.

For days when we just don't want to stand out, black has a way of shrouding us like a comforting winter blanket, while delivering a look that has enviable levels of style kudos.

Take the outfit that Grace Sickles, spotted in NYC's Meatpacking District, wears here. She's sporting leather pants — an idea that can seem intimidating — with the ease of a pair of boyfriend jeans. That's all due to her styling: those comfy biker boots, the oversized coat, the furry scarf and fuzzy bobble hat. The overall effect is polished and slick, yet practical and accessible.

ALICE TATE
letters@metro.us

Soften a moody leather look with fuzzy accessories.
SHANITA SIMS

1 High-waist leather pants

$64,
www.topshop.com

2 Tu es Mon Tresor striped fur stole

$769, www.brownsfashion.com

3 W118 by Walter Baker shirt with leather trim

$89, www.theoutnet.com

4 Aritzia Wilfred Fei coat

$224.99,
www.aritzia.com

5 Madewell the Biker boot

$238,
www.madewell.com

Footwear

These socks were made for walking

Center City resident Kevin Clerkin, 28, a former finance guy and self-described "lifelong sock enthusiast," is using Kickstarter to fund his first foray into fashion. Walk On...Socks With Sole is a line of dress socks for men with detailed designs on the soles — for example, woven moons that let you "walk on the moon" and eggshells to, well, you get it.

The socks are 80 percent cotton, 15 percent nylon and 5 percent spandex. They're also 14 inches long, which, Clerkin says, is longer than the sock norm and helps them stay up instead of bunching down.

Pledge $16 through Kickstarter and you'll get one pair of socks, while $38 or more gets you three pairs (one pair each of the initial three designs available). In the future, Clerkin plans to sell the socks through www.walkonsocks.com.
RACHEL VIGODA

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The latest addition to children's books

Publishing.
McSweeney's brings its irreverent brand to children's literature with the McMullens imprint.

A funny thing happened to the publishing company McSweeney's: Children began to appear. Just as its fan base started to think about procreating, so did the tight-knit staff, which publishes the quarterly literary journal "Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern," the monthly magazine "The Believer," an assortment of book imprints and other upscale, stylized publications.

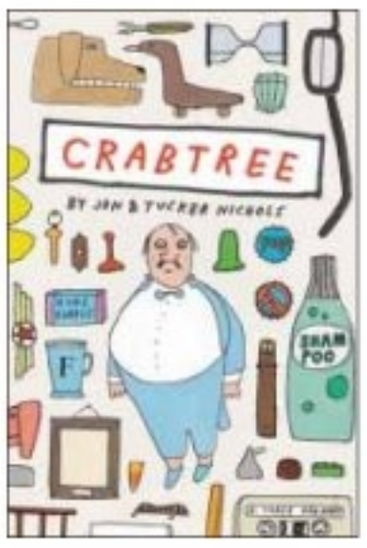
"McSweeney's has always been eclectic; it's always been open to publishing any kind of book, irrespective of genre," recounts Brian McMullen, who started working for the operation in 2002 as an intern. "The only real qualifying thing [to have us publish it] is that it's interesting to us as editors and as readers."

And what slowly became interesting to the full-time staff of nine were children's books. "We found ourselves saturated in children's literature more than we used to be," McMullen remembers. Since its launch, McSweeney's would publish an occasional children's book here and there, but once they saw the commercial and artistic appeal of them decided to devote an imprint solely to publishing creative, interesting kids' books. And so, under the guidance of McMullen, the McSweeney's McMullens children's imprint was born.

McMullen, now the editorial and art director of the imprint, shares some of his favorite books to get any kid's collection going:

"Crabtree"

Jon and Tucker Nichols
"This is probably our best-reviewed and best-distributed book yet. Tucker Nichols is a gallery artist in San Francisco; he worked with his brother Jon on this, their first kids' book together. Tucker uses his style that he uses for all of his artwork, which usually hangs in galleries, on this book for kids. It's very funny, witty and so re-readable. It's just a beautiful book about a guy who is an intensive collector, and he has to go through all of his belongings and try to find his missing false teeth. At a glance, sometimes our books get misconstrued as being primarily art books,



and it can be enjoyed on that level, but our first goal is to please children and be able to hand them something that we're proud to sit down and read with them, or give to somebody who can sit down and read with their child."

"Hang Glider and Mud Mask"

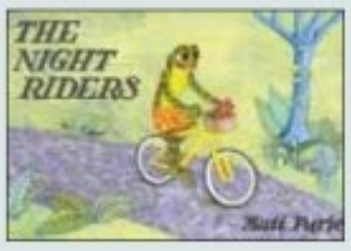
Jason Jagel and Brian McMullen
"This is a book I wrote with art by Jason Jagel. It's a book constructed in a Z shape; it has two spines. It's essentially a book you can start reading from either end and has a looping narrative. You can start from one end and get one character's side of the story, or you can start from the other side of the book and get the other character's side of the story. The characters meet in the physical middle of the book; it's a very sweet narrative and you can keep reading it in a continuous loop with your child until they get tired of reading it. You can be so inventive and playful. It's probably the best form of any kind of book for visual storytelling. It's a fantastic art form, and we're only going to see more of an appreciation of it."

DOROTHY ROBINSON
dorothy.robinson@metro.us

Art book

"The Night Riders"

Matt Furie
"This is a wonderful, wordless picture book. Furie took an entire year to draw it by hand with colored pencil. I think half the customers of that



book are people who bought it as a coffee-table book because they love the art so much. They're treating it almost like a monograph. There's a lot of slippage sometimes between what's an art book and what's a book for kids. I think a lot of the books we're producing get classified as both."

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2005 Mercury Mariner Premiere

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Horoscope

♒ Aquarius | Jan. 21-Feb 18. Investment opportunities will be dubious and unlikely to yield results. Be scrupulous about whom to trust with your cash.

♓ Pisces | Feb. 19-March 20. It may be a challenge to relate to your partner right now. Listen carefully to his or her concerns, but avoid voicing your opinions.

♈ Aries | March 21-April 20. Investing in property will be your best bet. Examine your options carefully. Consider joint ventures. Women may present you with opportunities.

♉ Taurus | April 21-May 21. Romantic opportunities can develop while traveling for business or attending a talk. You can complete contracts.

♊ Gemini | May 22-June 20. You can improve your financial situation through carefully considered investments or handling other people's money.

♋ Cancer | June 21-July 22. You may see a return on past investments. You will cherish the company of children if you act intelligently. Self-improvement will have a beneficial outcome.

♌ Leo | July 23-Aug. 22. You will be most efficient if you can work from home today. Catch up on any housework you have been avoiding lately.

♍ Virgo | Aug. 23-Sept. 22. You must take full advantage of any opportunity to travel. Keep your personal life to yourself for the time being. Correspondence is unlikely to reach you.

♎ Libra | Sept. 23-Oct. 22. You will likely feel extravagant. Your lover may end up costing you today. Avoid lending money or possessions to female friends.

♏ Scorpio | Oct. 23-Nov. 21. You should make time to discuss the future with your partner. Short trips will help to ease your communication.

♐ Sagittarius | Nov. 22-Dec. 21. Being evasive or avoidant will backfire on you today. Now is the time to come clean and hope for the best.

♑ Capricorn | Dec. 22-Jan 20. Someone may try to undermine you today. Be clear and direct when talking to superiors or colleagues.

BERNICE BEDE OSOL

Sudoku: Easy and hard

1				6	8			
7	3				2	4	6	
								9
2			5	9		7		
		9	2	7	3	8		
		5		8	1			2
3								
	4	6	1				9	3
			6	3				8

7	4					5		
							2	
2		8			1	3		4
6		2	4					
5		4	6		7	2		3
					3	6		1
1		3	5			7		2
	7							
		6					5	9

How to play
Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved. You solve the puzzle with reasoning and logic.

Letters

Biebs isn't special

Re: 'Bigger they are...' (Metro, Jan. 27) Letter writer Thomas Robertson is missing the point. The average person doesn't take pleasure in the failings of others. It is when the privileged ones who think the rules don't apply to them fail that we rejoice. If it had not been someone famous drag racing and having his friends block off streets, they would all be arrested without question, so why is it being questioned that Justin Bieber was arrested? And as for Gov. Christie, as you say, he got CAUGHT. A young, out-of-control rich child is finally going to have to come clean — and so will Bieber.

BRIAN GRAU, VIA EMAIL

You're not metal, madam

Re: 'A life worth giving' (Metro, Jan. 23) Letter writer Jeff Estano advocates for the civil rights of "the smallest of our citizens," namely the unborn. He seems to believe that U.S. citizens have a right to live and grow inside another person's body and feed off that person's blood, WITHOUT that person's consent. Mr. Estano, women are not machines. They are not incubators.

PASQUALE G. TATO, VIA EMAIL

letters@metro.us

Keep them as brief as possible, preferably under 100 words. Metro reserves the right to edit all letters. Please include your name and contact info.

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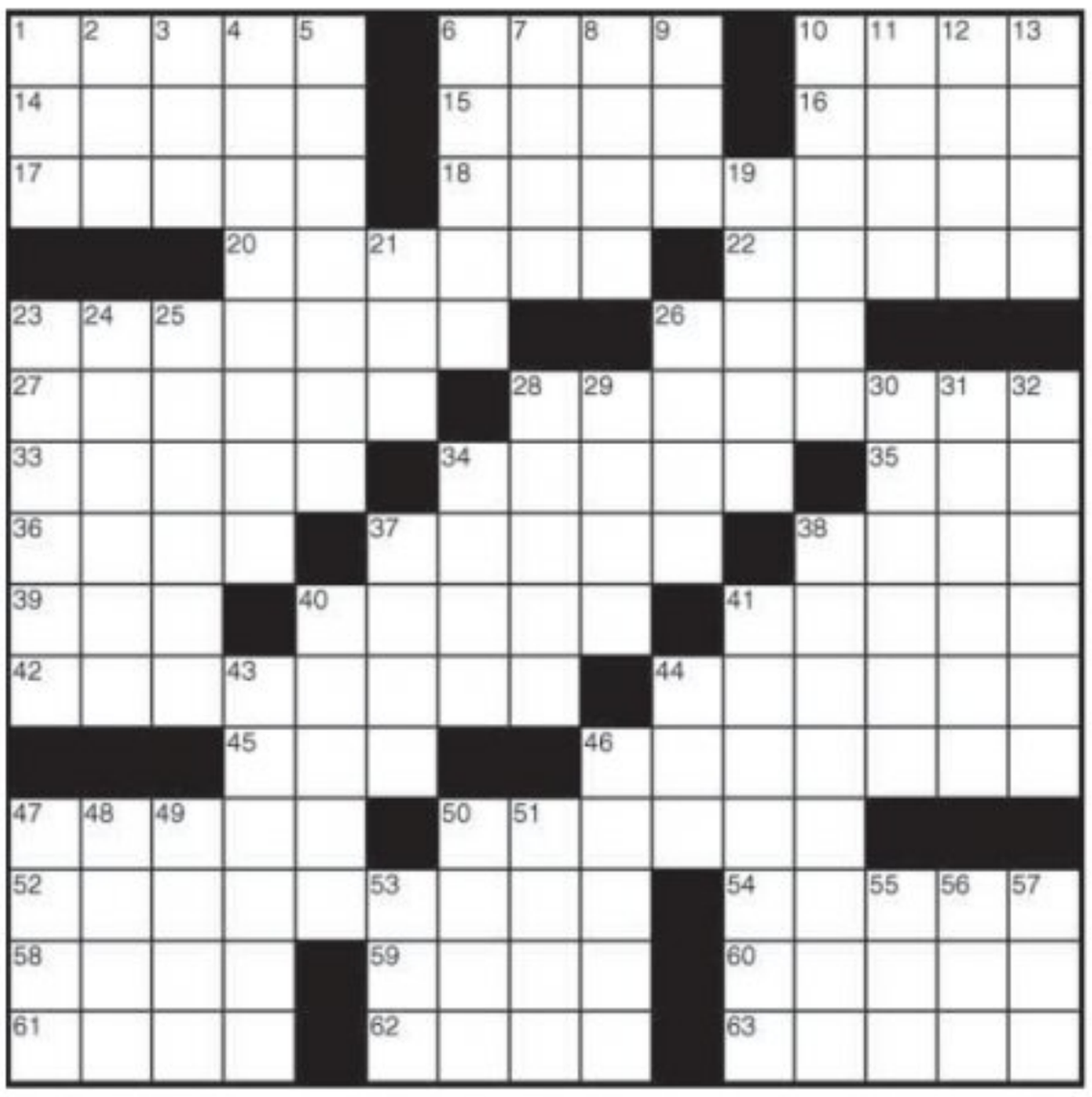
Interactive Crossword

Crossword

Across
1 Urban, for short
6 Snowman accessory
10 Thumbs-up
14 Peacocks do it
15 Not working
16 Whey-faced
17 Ernest or Julio
18 Of a Stone Age period
20 Spouted rhetoric
22 Fractional part
23 Trucker's need (2 wds.)
26 Kitchen item
27 Wearing a cowl
28 Emphasize (2 wds.)
33 Gantry of fiction
34 Metamorphic rock
35 Monk's title
36 Use a Kindle
37 Dally with
38 Shellfish
39 Coffee brewer
40 Disconnected
41 Alan Ladd film
42 Reservations
44 Social standing
45 Picnic intruder
46 Earliest
47 Burning
50 Earl Grey's place
52 Gad (2 wds.)
54 Defame
58 Most desirable
59 Novelist — Seton
60 Dormant
61 Shampoo additive
62 Hero's deed
63 Spurred on

Down
1 Auto-sticker info
2 Baseball stat
3 Util. bill
4 Added ammo
5 Not in stock (2 wds.)
6 Bean or horse
7 — fixe
8 Tramp along
9 Electric fish
10 Choosing
11 Actress Madeline —
12 Perched
13 "Ugh!"
19 Foolish, plus
21 Relief
23 Little angel
24 Short jacket
25 Parmesan cousin
26 Dirk — (Cussler hero)
28 Rapture
29 Red inside
30 Recently (2 wds.)
31 Seventh planet
32 Most docile
34 Wade through
37 Basin in a church
38 Mantra recitation
40 Hard-hit drive
41 Cop's contact
43 Dojo activity
44 Peace offering
46 Mubarak predecessor
47 "Waterloo" singing group
48 Oil or kerosene
49 "— — Excited"
50 Adjust a piano
51 "Orinoco Flow" singer
53 Lummox
55 Canine command
56 Previously
57 Soho co.

Yesterday's answer



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FOLES NEEDS TO OPEN HIS MOUTH TO BE A STAR IN NFL

Nick Foles said last week that it was an incredible honor to be in the Pro Bowl. Richard Sherman bellowed on national TV that he is the world's best cornerback. Foles gets no respect. Sherman has the top-selling jersey in the NFL.

What's wrong with this picture? Well, actually, it is an accurate snapshot of how to become rich and famous in American sports today. Sherman understands the system. Foles has no clue.

Just three weeks after an amazing season that ended despite a brilliant late drive against New Orleans, Foles has as many doubters as supporters. It was not his fault that the Eagles' special teams and defense squandered the lead he gave them in the playoffs, and yet somehow now it is. There is very little love for Nick Foles in the NFL.

Last week alone, Foles was the second-to-last pick in the stupid new choose-up-sides Pro Bowl; he went on to win the offensive MVP award in the game. Foles had a higher quarterback rating than Peyton Manning in Manning's finest season, but the bozos selecting the team, Jerry Rice and Deion Sanders, clearly were not impressed.

Eagles quarterback Nick Foles went 7-for-10, throwing for 89 yards and a touchdown to earn offensive MVP honors in Sunday's Pro Bowl. / GETTY IMAGES

The Voice of Philly Sports

ANGELO CATALDI

Cataldi on Foles

"It was not his fault that the Eagles' special teams and defense squandered the lead he gave them in the playoffs, and yet somehow now it is."

Then there was Pro Football Focus, one of the most respected football websites, which chose Tony Romo of Dallas as the top quarterback in the NFC East. Pro Football Focus has preached all year about the importance of limiting turnovers. Romo threw 10 interceptions last season; Foles tossed two. Romo had a QB rating of 98; Foles recorded a historic 119. And somehow Romo won the honor.

Of course, Foles reacted to none of these slights, just as he shrugged at the tepid weekly verbal support from coach Chip Kelly all season. If 27 touchdown passes and a 10-6 record are not enough to convince the naysayers, what is?

Richard Sherman answered that question when he exploded into the American consciousness with his hideous display of poor sportsmanship after Seattle had beaten San Francisco in the NFC championship game. Not only did he echo Muhammad Ali's "I am the greatest!" boasts of a half-century ago, he belittled Niners receiver Michael Crabtree in the process.

Does anyone believe Sherman, a Stanford grad, erupted the way he did strictly in the heat of battle? He did not. On the other hand, Foles is — let's be honest here — boring. Although he is the same age as Sherman (25), he lacks the moxie to demand the respect he has earned. He is a cliché machine, a lousy sound bite, a far-too-humble man.

When Foles first arrived in Philadelphia, everyone wanted to know if he had a big enough arm to become a star in the NFL. Now the question is, does he have a big enough mouth?

3 SPORTS

Villanova drops

Unbeaten teams top newest rankings

Perfect Arizona and Syracuse stand at No. 1 and 2 respectively in the newest AP Top 25 poll with Arizona receiving all but two first-place votes. Florida, undefeated Wichita State and San Diego State round out a diverse Top 5. Villanova dropped from fourth to ninth after their loss to Creighton last week.

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Idle thoughts

- At the Senior Bowl last week, Eagles GM Howie Roseman spoke at length about what it takes to be a good safety in the NFL. Just one question: If he is such an expert, why do the Eagles have no good safeties?
- The Flyers continue to puzzle fans who cannot see the hockey team for what it is — an enigma. The offense is inconsistent, the defense is so-so and the goaltending is beginning to reflect mediocrity of the rest of the team. The Flyers will not win the Stanley Cup this season. They will not win it while Ed Snider is chairman. Sorry.
- Mike Pettine, of Central Bucks West, had his lifelong dream come true last week when he was named head coach in Cleveland. Unfortunately, he will now report directly to miserable former Eagles president Joe Banner. Kids, be careful what you wish for.

Cataldi. NFL's Goodell painfully out of touch with average fans

ROGER GOODELL
GETTY IMAGES

The NFL has a big problem as their marquee event unfolds over the next week in the media capital of the world. Commissioner Roger Goodell is going to make a fool of himself, and of his sport, in the days ahead. Book it right now.

In fact, Goodell previewed his inevitable downfall at Super Bowl XLVIII in New York (or New Jersey, if you must) with a comment last week that established yet again how completely out of step he is with the fans who have made his sport the most successful in American history. He just doesn't get it. He never will.

Goodell actually told a New York newspaper that the NFL priced 1,000 tickets for the Super Bowl at $500 to include the less advantaged fans. Let that sink in for a second: Goodell, who makes around $30 million a year, thinks $500 per ticket is a fan-friendly gesture. (The rest of the tickets are going for $1,000, $1,500, $2,000 and $2,500.)

The real story of the event about to take place is that most fans have no desire to attend the game because of this insidious greed. A WIP radio Internet poll last week showed 85 percent of Philadelphia sports fans would rather watch the game on TV than endure the astounding prices associated with Super Bowl XLVIII.

Goodell answers to only one boss, and it is the Almighty Dollar. He wants to expand the sport to Europe, sell some Thursday night games to yet another TV network and increase the schedule to 18 games — all in service to making the billionaire owners even richer. This attitude is a recipe for disaster.

ANGELO CATALDI

Cataldi on the Phils

Abreu's return bizarre move for Phillies

Bobby Abreu signed a contract last week to return to the Phillies. Honest. He really did. The timid, lazy outfielder who was unpopular in his first tour of duty here will get a curtain call at spring training in Clearwater. This is not a joke.

Unfortunately for GM Ruben Amaro, the reaction to this bizarre move took an already terrible offseason and made him the laughingstock of Philadelphia sports. When the two big roster moves of the winter are signing 37-year-old Marlon Byrd and 40-year-old Bobby Abreu, what reaction are the fans going to offer? Basically, we all laughed. Because the only alternative was to cry.

The Phillies are going to be bad in 2014 — really, really bad. Amaro tried desperately to spin a different theme in the media last week, but no exercise in logic can turn a 73-89 team into a winner after this offseason. Amaro said he understands the skepticism. But he signed Abreu anyway. ANGELO CATALDI

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NFL hopes lasers can help boost attendance

NFL. Sometimes watching at home seems better than actually being there.

The NFL could make first downs easier to see in the stadium using laser technology. / GETTY IMAGES

Year after year, the NFL rakes in billions. It is the most successful sports league in North America — and it continues to grow.

Still, there are plenty of areas in which the league needs to improve.

Among the league's top issues may be a threat posed by the very thing that made the league so popular in the first place: television.

The advantages of staying at home to watch football these days typically far outweigh the benefits of the in-stadium experience.

"The NFL told us that their biggest competition is the couch and the beer in the fridge. They're really fighting with that," said Alan Amron, founder and chairman of First Down Laser. "They won't admit it outright, but people aren't going to the stadium like they used to."

Fans at home get the benefit of changing camera angles and the all-important "yellow line" that shows where the first down marker is.

Amron and his former partner in this endeavor, late broadcaster Pat Summerall, pitched the idea of a laser as a first down marker to the league office and the competition committee eight years ago.

The idea is that a 4-inch wide laser, projected from sideline to sideline, would give everyone in the stadium — players, coaches and referees — a much better idea of what is and what is not a first down.

"Pat and I got great, positive feedback from the league," Amron said. "Pat really wanted to see the game evolve. He had a passion for the game. Anything to make things more accurate on the field."

Lasers could benefit players

"Right now players try to contort themselves after catching the ball to take a look to the sidelines to see where the marker is."

Alan Amron, chairman of First Down Laser

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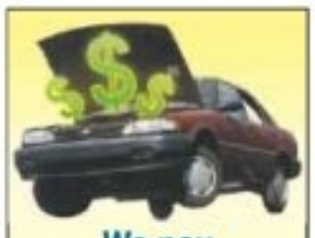

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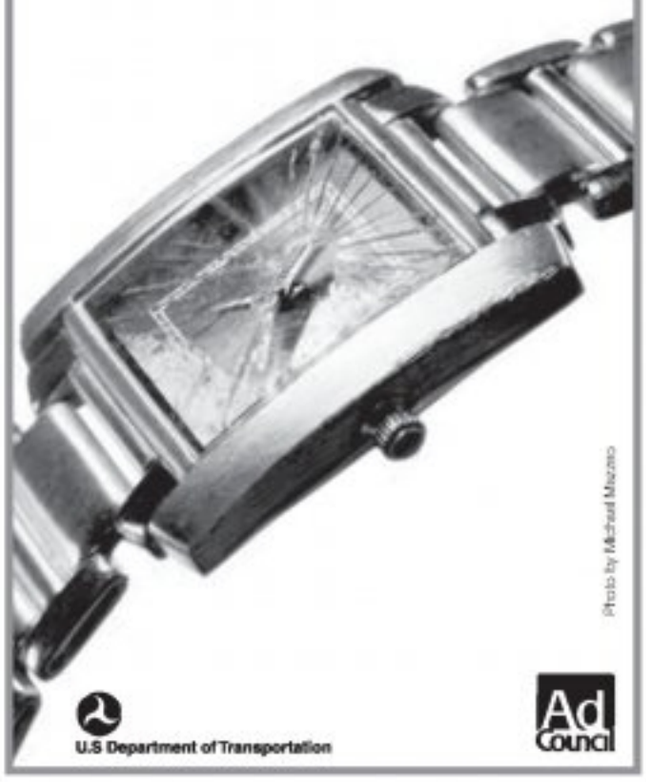

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